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ists of U.S. agents abroad abound

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WASHINGTON — Counter-Spy, sad to say, is not the only publication that fingers CIA agents and makes it easier for foreign powers and terrorist gangs to kill them. The State Department's own directories must share the blame.

THAT SORRY FACT LENDS a tinge of hypocrisy to the bitter accusations from CIA headquarters, the State Department and the White House that the Athens slaying of Richard S. Welch, CIA chief in Greece, was abetted by his listing in Counter-Spy, the periodical of a counter-culture group known as Fifth Estate, which is out to destroy the CIA.

Tim Butz of Fifth Estate hotly denies any complicity, even indirect, in Welch's murder.

"We don't want to see anyone shot," Butz says.

The State Department, presumably, does not either.

Yet the inescapable truth is that the department's foreign-service directories

and embassy personnel listings, by treating CIA overseas operatives differently than regular diplomats, makes it ridiculously easy for America's enemies to spot them, keep tabs on them and, if it suits somebody's purpose, to set them up for assassination.

Welch, for example, was officially listed in Athens as "special assistant" to U.S. Ambassador Jack B. Kubisch and "first secretary" of the U.S. Embassy. So far, fair enough.

But the U.S. Foreign Service "stud book," as it is dubbed in the department, designated Welch as "FSRU-3," one of the telltale classifications that any foreign intelligence agency looks for in tracking down CIA agents abroad.

Welch's designation of "FSRU-3" stands for "foreign service reserve unlimited," a classification used by the State Department to identify persons who are not its own career diplomats or "foreign service officers (FSO)."

Another category used for CIA operatives, or non-State Department personnel, is "foreign service reserve (FSR)," a

classification meaning a person must be reappointed every five years.

The fact that Welch was carried by the State Department as an FSRU means, to any knowledgeable student of the lists, that he was a special individual and not subject to periodic reappointment. Additionally, the number 3 marked him as relatively high on the status chart. Any foreign intelligence analyst with a grain of sense could pick out Welch as a person of unusual importance, for older State Department directories show him as an FSRU-3 in Lima, Peru, and in Georgetown, Guyana, his posts prior to going to Athens five months ago.

In its own defense, the State Department contends it must have a classification system that separates career diplomats from nondepartmental types like CIA agents, labor attaches and economists and agriculture specialists who are on "loan" from other government agencies for temporary duty abroad.

But CIA men, and other non-FSO persons overseas, contend the system has another purpose: the desire of the State Department to identify its own officers as an elite group within embassy staffs. In any event, why doesn't the department keep its listings a secret if it must keep a list, rather than publishing directories that are available not only to departmental officials but also to outsiders?

Indeed, this reporter and others for years have used the "stud book" to help locate non-FSO specialists stationed abroad — including the CIA "spooks."

So difficult has the State Department made it for CIA agents to maintain a semblance of "cover" that one former operative told me bitterly that it was a prime reason why he left the agency.

In a transfer from one country to another, for example, his classification was dropped from "second secretary" to "clerk," an unlikely shift that was quick to arouse the curiosity of the foreign counterintelligence bureau in his new post. Additionally, he was forced to operate without diplomatic immunity, meaning he had no sanctuary even while engaged at the time in noncovert work.

"I don't mind risking my life," the